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SUBJECT: HUNGARY'S ELECTIONS: SNAPSHOT OF MDF'S UNEXPECTED
FIRST-ROUND ELECTORAL SUCCESS (C-RE6-00145)

REF: A. STATE 22644
[B](#). BUDAPEST 722
[C](#). BUDAPEST 733

Summary

[1](#). (U) Junior opposition party MDF's capture of 5.04 percent of the county list vote in the April 9 first round of the election, surprised pundits, pollsters and even MDF insiders. With one week remaining before Hungary's elections, three public opinion research companies here predicted that MDF would not reach the 5 percent mark required to enter Parliament. Observers suggested that MDF may have been the last-minute beneficiary of the April 6 four-way debate and a right-wing protest vote against FIDESZ. Although MDF has finished third in forty-seven of the remaining 110 individual districts and is in a position to help or hurt FIDESZ in the second round, MDF President Ibolya David has categorically ruled out any possibility of a coalition or coordination with FIDESZ.

The Reason Why

[1](#)2. (SBU) MDF's popularity ratings increased noticeably in the final week of the campaign. (Note: Prior to the April 5 and 6 inter-party debates all major Hungarian polls showed MDF hovering between 2 and 4 percent.) Observers have suggested various reasons for the party's eleventh-hour recovery:

-- MDF President Ibolya David's strong showing in the four-party debate on April 6. Observers contend that many Hungarians of all political stripes viewed David's performance favorably. The public opinion research company Szonda Ipsos showed that MDF went from 3.1 percent before the debate to 4 percent immediately afterward. Other pollsters agreed. Gallup claimed that if the elections had occurred one week earlier, MDF would not have won the five percent necessary to be represented in Parliament. Regardless, pollsters said that the difference between their predictions and the final percentage was a matter of 2500 votes, which is well within the margin of error in a voting pool of 8.1 million;

--David's personal popularity. (Note: David consistently polls as the most popular politician in Hungary, despite the fact that she finished a dismal third in the first round contest in her own district and will likely be forced to enter Parliament via MDF's party list.);

--A last minute spending and campaign blitz. MDF leaders told poloffs that because of their lack of financial resources, the party would only start intensive advertising on the eve of the elections. In recent weeks the country has been inundated with posters that have pictures of pacifiers, and Christmas trees, with the message that Hungarian voters are not children to be bought with extravagant promises;

--FIDESZ's overt desire to destroy or absorb MDF likely motivated conservative voters to turn out in larger numbers in order to preserve a bona-fide conservative party;

-- Favorable state-run media coverage. (Note: In an on-air interview after the elections, David thanked the GOH administered MTV for its coverage, causing speculation that the government-run media had spotlighted MDF in order to undercut FIDESZ. There have also been rumors that MSZP contributed support to MDF in attempts to accomplish this as well.);

--MDF's ability to stay on message. David has consistently hammered away at the issue of corruption, fiscal prudence and on MDF as the "adult choice" or alternative for right-wing voters disillusioned with the FIDESZ's populism and negative campaign.

MDF's Support

13. (SBU) MDF seems to have benefited from its identification as the sole conservative party. On the county lists, MDF's support ranged from 3.83 percent in Borsod-Abauj-Zemplen County to 5.96 percent in Tolna County. Generally, MDF did

well in traditionally conservative counties, largely in western Hungary. FIDESZ dominated these counties, but the turnout for MDF indicates that many of the local conservatives did not view FIDESZ as the best "right wing" party. FIDESZ also won the most county votes in eight of the eleven counties where MDF exceeded its national average of 5.04 percent, further lending credence to the possibility that the MDF surge was due to conservatives' desire to send a message to FIDESZ, and/or vote for a "true" right-of-center party.

14. (SBU) MDF also performed well in two regions where FIDESZ did not: Budapest (which gave MDF approximately 54 thousand votes, almost one-fifth of its total) and Baranya County (home to the city of Pecs). Those results seem to support the idea that much of MDF's strength comes from urban conservatives. Orban himself attributed part of FIDESZ's poor showing to the fact that city voter's turned out in greater numbers than rural voters. It so, that would have boosted MDF.

Written in Stone

15. (U) To have any chance of winning the election, FIDESZ must win 75 of the remaining 110 individual mandates in round two. In 34 of these districts, if added to already existing FIDESZ votes, MDF or MDF/MIEP-Jobbik votes could theoretically give FIDESZ enough support to win. Orban is aware of this, and had appealed for MDF cooperation in "ousting the communist regime and governing the country." To date, his appeals have fallen on deaf ears. David told reporters April 10 that MDF would not withdraw candidates in deference to FIDESZ, and that her party would not "cheat voters" who did not vote for FIDESZ or MSZP. At MDF headquarters, she said, the party had erected a stone wall in which the "message was carved" that they would not help Orban or Prime Minister Gyurscany. In response to a FIDESZ request for cooperation, MDF's board voted April 10 for no candidate withdrawals. (Backtracking on such public commitments would be very difficult at this juncture MDF.) In addition, the

above-mentioned FIDESZ attempts to crush MDF have further dampened any desire of MDF supporters to work with FIDESZ. A Median poll shows that over half of MDF voters would not vote for FIDESZ, even if FIDESZ and MSZP were the only two choices on the ballot.

¶6. (U) Visit Embassy Budapest's classified website:

www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/budapest/index.cfm

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